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RESULTS IN THE PRUSSIAN GYMNASIUM

It may be said at the outset that nowhere else in the world are the general conditions more favorable to good schools than in Germany. In no other country is a sound education more necessary for the maintenance of the integrity of the nation and the autonomy of the race. The instinct of national preservation acts as a powerful incentive towards such a system of instruction and discipline as shall result in seriousness of mind and a readiness to submit to rigid laws. If we were surrounded on either side by powerful and aggressive enemies, and if our national existence depended upon our having a large number of highly educated and well trained men, it would be less difficult to impress our people with the importance of a vigorous and scientific training. As it is, there are not a few of the patrons of our secondary schools who not only do not believe in the necessity of subjecting boys to systematic and thorough discipline, but decidedly object to it when their own children are concerned.

In any attempt to estimate the value of the training of the gymnasium, or to find out how the secondary schools of Prussia obtain their results, the first thing to be reckoned with is their peculiar system of school government. It is effective and complete to the last degree. The order is so perfect, and the attention of the pupils to the work in hand is so absorbing and persistent that the superficial observer cannot fail to be impressed with admiration for the system and pity for the boys. The sources of such a severe form of school government must be sought for, I believe, outside of the school. The presence of a large standing army, the belief that there is urgent need of maintaining it at the highest point of efficiency, and the strict enforcement of a rigid code of civil and criminal law have more to do with fixing the standard of discipline in the schools than the schools themselves. No American teacher would wish to see such an artificial and arbitrary standard of school government established here. It is neither possible nor desirable.

The purposes of school government in the two countries are widely different. Prussian children are trained to submit to authority, but our boys must be taught to govern themselves. The former are to be the subjects of a despot, the latter are to participate in the government of a free state. This difference in the purposes of school government involves a corresponding unlikeness in methods of discipline. In the one country the control of the school is direct, absolute and sometimes severe; in the other the teacher constantly appeals to the reason of both pupils and parents and exercises strict authority under the law only as a last resort. To bring a school under effective control by methods that command the assent of reasonable and liberty-loving pupils is just as difficult and quite as essential as to give skillful instruction in the several subjects of study. Our boys, as we believe, must have a definite degree of freedom of action, the larger the better so long as the proper work of the school is not interfered with. But to determine just where the liberty of the pupil shall end and the restraint of the school begin is a question so complex and delicate that it often taxes to the utmost the wisdom and resources of the teacher. The Prussian schoolmaster is not called upon to solve any such perplexing problem. The time, thought and energy which we expend in school management, he may devote to strengthening his scholarship and increasing the efficiency of his instruction.

But in respect to effectiveness of organization the superiority of the Prussian gymnasium is very great. I use the word organization to include the curriculum of studies, the character and methods of the instruction, and the training, appointment and pensioning of teachers. In formulating and executing wise plans of education an autocratic government has immense advantages. The wisest men may be called upon for counsel, and the ablest men of the empire may be entrusted with the responsibility of administering the affairs of the schools. In Germany a great school reform may be inaugurated in a day; in America reforms come only after long periods of discussion and agitation.

In Prussia there is a splendidly elaborated system of state schools; in America there is a kind of local option in education.

The general looseness and weakness of our organization seem to be a part of the price that we have to pay for our free institutions. The right of our municipalities to organize and direct their own schools is as carefully guarded and persistently maintained as if the perpetuity of the civil liberties of the people were dependent upon it. The slowness of the decadence of the old New England district school system is a striking illustration of the stubbornness with which our people resist all tendencies towards centralization in government. Under our present municipal form of organization we cannot expect to have such a uniformly good system of schools as we find in Prussia.

Another source of weakness in our education becomes apparent when we begin to examine our courses of study. They are more varied in their form and content than the climate and productions of the localities which they represent. They lack coherence, rational order, and stability. They are subject to the caprice of school superintendents, principals, teachers and influential members of school boards, who may, or may not, be well informed in the philosophy of education. In Prussia, however, programs of studies are carefully matured by wise and learned men after a protracted and profound study of the ends and means of education. Our lecturers on education talk in a wise way about the correlation of studies, but in Prussia we may see the principles of correlation in actual operation in the courses of study and methods of instruction. This is especially true in the gymnasium where we find a definite and elaborate scheme of studies and a careful attention to the details of instruction. I cannot attempt within the limitations of this paper to give a formal analysis of the curriculum of the gymnasium. And yet, it is easy to find embodied in it several of the most important principles formulated by the Committee of Ten. I quote from page 16 of their report. "It is inevitable, therefore, that specialists in any one of the subjects which are pursued in the high schools or colleges should earnestly desire that the minds of young children be stored with some of the elementary facts and principles of their subjects; and that all the mental habits which the adult student will surely need, begin to be formed in the

child's mind before the age of fourteen." The acceptance of this most important general truth would revolutionize our elementary education. Prussia has already accepted it and demonstrated its practicability and utility. The boy of fourteen in the gymnasium has had something more than the husks of learning. He has had five years of Latin, two years of Greek, five years of history with the related geography, five years in the elements of arithmetic, algebra and geometry, four years of natural history with one of physics, and a continuous course of five years in German, religion, writing, drawing, singing, and gymnastics. A comparison of these subjects of study with those that are set before a boy from nine to fourteen years of age in an average American grammar school, will show very clearly one of the means by which the Prussian gymnasium achieves such large results. The pupil's vigor of application, range of thought and grasp of subject-matter during these golden years of a boy's education are much greater with them than with us. Their program of studies is much more extensive and intensive than ours, and, although the gymnasium is a clearly defined classical institution, only about 35 per cent. of its time is spent upon Latin and Greek. It is worthy of note too that there are no short courses in any subject of study. German, Latin, history, mathematics, science, religion, singing and gymnastics are pursued continuously for nine years; while French and Greek are studied respectively seven and six years.

I have already alluded to the great superiority of the organization of the Prussian schools. To my mind the most striking and important characteristic of this organization is the large number of class exercises. The average number per week for the nine years of the curriculum of the gymnasium is thirty-three. This includes singing, drawing, and gymnastics, but excludes English and Hebrew, which are electives. It is well-nigh impossible to exaggerate the far-reaching significance of this fact, when we attempt to compare the achievements in scholarship of the Prussian gymnasium with the results attained in the secondary schools of the United States. Twenty lessons a week nearly represent the maximum in our best schools,

What would be the outcome if we could enlarge this number by 50 or 60 per cent. ? The curriculum could be enriched, more subjects of study could be pursued continuously, and the effectiveness of the instruction could be increased. Consider the amount of energy that our pupils expend in misdirected and futile efforts. Compute the time that is wasted before they acquire the habits of study, or the power of persistent application, by means of which the student grapples successfully with subjects that are hard to understand. In the gymnasium this loss and waste are minimized. For instance, perplexing problems in mathematics are solved under the eye and guidance of the teacher. The paradigms of Latin and Greek are clearly taught in the class room ; they are not memorized as disconnected facts, but practice in the use of words in their right relations goes on *pari passu* with a study of their forms. This stimulating help of the teacher insures rapid progress, and runs clear of the errors and misconceptions that pupils make, who spend only enough time with the teacher to recite the lessons that they have learned elsewhere. It must be, too, that no inconsiderable number of our pupils fail in scholarship for the lack of just such skillful and systematic instruction as the Prussian teachers give, and which we cannot impart for want of time. Those who survive the struggle in our schools are doubtless more self reliant than the students of the gymnasium, but, since only about two thirds as much time is given to their instruction, they cannot fairly be expected to attain the same standard of scholarship.

In listening to recitations in foreign languages, I was forcibly impressed again and again with the fact that the instruction of the gymnasium appeals to the sense of hearing more than to the sense of sight. In our own schools it is quite common to see translations from English into foreign languages written by pupils on blackboards and corrected in the presence of the class. An exercise of this kind in the gymnasium did not once come under my observation. An equal amount of work was often done orally in less than half the time. But written lessons were not wholly neglected. Test exercises written in blank books

and subsequently corrected by the teacher were sufficiently frequent to acquaint the instructor with the progress of each pupil and the accuracy of his knowledge of vocabulary, forms and syntax. The rapidity of these oral exercises was quite wonderful, and surpassed anything of the kind that I have ever seen in the schools of this country. This unusual facility in oral recitations is of course a natural consequent of a greater fullness and readiness of the memory. In the younger classes the demands made upon this faculty are severe and continuous. The Germans seem to recognize more clearly than we do, that the years preceding adolescence are best adapted to the acquisition of knowledge through the memory.

A writer in a recent number of the *SCHOOL REVIEW* declared that the aims of classical study in Germany have undergone radical modifications in recent years. My observations agree with this declaration. The official statement of the general aim of the study of Latin in Prussia is expressed in these words: "The understanding of the more important classical authors and philological training." It was clearly evident in the instruction that the order of importance of the two general aims mentioned agrees with their order of precedence. In the more advanced classes the examination and discussion of the content of the classic authors occupied a large share of the time of the recitation. Questions concerning the modes of warfare, the institutions of government, and the forms and essence of the morality, religion and philosophy of the ancient Greeks and Romans constantly recurred. In one recitation where a group of boys eleven years old were reading Nepos, the greater part of the hour was spent in a discussion suggested by the words, "columna rostrata." The central purpose seemed to be to inspire the boys with humane thoughts and high ideals. The study of the laws of language is necessarily made prominent in the elementary classes, but in the latter part of the course this gives way to the critical examination of the content of the literature.

The method of teaching history to classes of young pupils seemed to be a successful combination of the lecture and recitation. The lesson began with a quiz on the review, which was

conducted with great rapidity and animation. The questions covered a wide range and were evidently designed to fasten permanently in the memory a general outline of important historic data. The quiz was followed by a lecture on the topic of the next day's lesson, which occupied about half of the hour. The lecture was so vivid and skillful that one class which I saw was quite carried away by their interest in the teacher's narrative. There are obvious advantages in thus blazing the way through a period of history for a class of young students who are too immature in judgment to find a way for themselves. In a class of older pupils I saw a good illustration of the so-called seminary method of studying history.

Nothing excited my admiration more than the simple device by which the gymnasium undertakes to exercise an almost complete control over the literature that the boys read during the years of childhood and youth. Every class room that I visited contained a small portable closet, in which was kept a collection of interesting books, carefully selected and adapted to the age and maturity of the class. The supply is kept good by occasional contributions of the boys, and the books are given out with sufficient frequency to provide the boys with all the books that they have time to read out of school. A scheme so simple and salutary as this is worthy of general adoption.

The incentives that operate upon the minds of the pupils in the Prussian secondary schools likewise demand consideration. The graduates of the gymnasium not only escape a year's military service, but they are the only ones who are permitted to study law, medicine, or theology in the university. The right to compete for the honors and emoluments of the learned professions is, therefore, open only to those who succeed in the gymnasium. This special privilege must tend not only to bring the most ambitious boys into the gymnasium, but to incite them to the loftiest achievements in scholarship.

But what shall we say of the Prussian schoolmaster? In all essential respects, he is a professional man. He is trained for his duties with the utmost care and forethought, and, in turn, is required to carry on his work of instruction with an equal

degree of precision and skill. After graduating from the gymnasium and university, he must serve an apprenticeship of two years without pay under the supervision of some head-master before he can become a candidate for an appointment. These precautions insure the selection of only the most worthy candidates, and tend to produce a class of teachers who are mature in years and scholarship, and well informed as to the purposes and methods of instruction. Add to this, permanency of tenure and the certainty of a pension, and we have a combination of conditions that yields a class of men who have a capacity for skillful and efficient service that is unsurpassed by the teachers of any other country.

The chief reasons for the excellent results obtained in the Prussian gymnasium may be summarized in a single sentence. They are national institutions ; they are believed to be essential to the national welfare ; they easily maintain the strictest and most effective discipline ; they have a broad, well-balanced, and substantial program of studies ; the number of hours per week devoted to class exercises is exceedingly large ; the purposes of the instruction are clearly defined ; the methods of instruction are well considered, and wisely adapted to meet the ends designed ; the incentives to study are extraordinary, and the teachers are well trained, mature, scholarly, secure in their positions, and sure of a pension when overtaken by ill-health or old age.

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